

Georgia's Second District U.S. Representative Sanford Bishop was elected Thursday (1/9) to fill one of the two vacant seats open to Democrats on the powerful House Appropriations Committee.

Representative Bishop was chosen at a caucus of House Democrats, which met Thursday morning to officially fill the committee seats allotted to the minority party in the newly convened 108th term of Congress. The House Democratic Steering Committee, headed by new Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi of California, voted the day before to recommend the five-term southwest Georgia lawmaker for the highly coveted assignment.

"I represent a fiscally responsible, mainstream, common sense ideology, and my election to the Appropriations Committee reflects the growing strength of this point of view among Democrats serving in Congress," Representative Bishop said. "As Minority Leader, Representative Pelosi recognizes the diversity of viewpoints that exists within the party. This reflects credit upon her and her leadership."

He added, "serving on the Appropriations Committee gives me a new and expanded opportunity to address the needs of our families; seniors; veterans; military personnel; businesses; farmers, including small and disadvantaged farmers; our schools and colleges; the unemployed and needy. It strengthens my hand in helping strengthen our economy and improve the quality of life for all of our citizens. It's good for Georgia and good for the Second Congressional District."

The Congressman noted that the other Democratic seat on the Appropriations Committee went to Representative Marion Berry of Arkansas, who is also recognized as a fiscal conservative who supports a strong military and a strong domestic safety net within a fiscally-sound budget. Representatives Bishop and Berry are both members of the "Blue Dog" Coalition, which consists of fiscally conservative Democrats in the House.

Under House rules, the Appropriations Committee and the Ways and Means Committee, which deals with taxation, are labeled "exclusive committees." Members serve on these panels exclusively, and do not simultaneously hold other committee assignments. This means Representative Bishop will not serve on the Agriculture and Intelligence committees, where he has served in the past. However, he pointed out that he would continue to have a direct voice in the formation and implementation of farm and intelligence programs and policies through the appropriations process.

He pointed out that the work of the Appropriations Committee shapes all areas of federal government, including defense; homeland security; veterans programs; farm and business-related programs; education; health care, and other federal responsibilities.

The appropriations committees in the House and Senate, which control the federal government's purse strings, are widely regarded as the most powerful committees in Congress. Other committees authorize federal activities, and the funding levels for those activities. However, it's the responsibility of the appropriations committees to write the actual federal budget, determining exactly how much shall be spent, or not spent, for all military and domestic programs.

"I've been fortunate to have served in key committee positions at a time when we were literally striving to save our farm economy and when we were greatly strengthening our intelligence capabilities in order to protect the country's people and infrastructure from the heightened threat of terrorism," Representative Bishop said. "My role will now be expanded."